

OOLOGICAL NOTES.

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I. Notes on the Nesting-place and Eggs of *Halcyon sordidus*,
Gould.

HALCYON SORDIDUS, the Mangrove Kingfisher.

Tchoon gun gun, Aborigines of Hinchinbrook Island.

This fine species of *Halcyon*, exceeding in size all other Australian members of the genus, inhabits the mangrove-lined mouths of the rivers and creeks of Northern and North-eastern Australia, being recorded at intervals along the coast-line and contiguous islands in favourable situations, from Port Darwin in the Northern Territory, to the neighbourhood of Fraser's Island and Wide Bay in South-eastern Queensland, and its range also extends to the Aru Islands and those of the Louisiade Group. It never ventures far inland, but is restricted in its habitat to those estuarine areas and salt-water creeks and marshes of the coast which are clothed with a dense growth of mangroves; in these secure haunts it obtains its food, which consists principally of small fish and crustaceans.

Mr. J. A. Boyd, of the Herbert River, Queensland, who has contributed largely towards a knowledge of the nidification of many birds in that district, informs me that it is not an uncommon species on the Herbert and Seymour Rivers, especially during the winter months. Recently Mr. Boyd has been successful in finding the hitherto unrecorded nesting-place of this species, the eggs of which he has kindly forwarded to me for description, together with the following interesting notes relative to the taking of them.

“ While on a trip to Hinchinbrook Island, I was camped in the beginning of October, 1892, on a ridge, which, intersecting the forest of mangrove, ran down to a salt-water creek about two miles from the sea. On several consecutive days I had noticed a Kingfisher (*H. sordidus*) settle on the limb of a tree that had fallen into the stream, and stay there some little time picking and pluming herself. As she always came from and returned in the same direction, I concluded that she was breeding, and on the 6th inst. I traced her to a Termite nest in a Blood-wood tree [*Eucalyptus corymbosa*] about thirty feet from the ground and leaning somewhat over the water. The tree was two feet and a-half at the base, and the ant nest not a large one, projecting only about twenty inches from the limb on which it was placed. I sent up a blackfellow, and he brought down three eggs, two of which were slightly incubated, and reported there was no made nest, the eggs being simply laid on the bare substance of the ant-heap at the end of the burrow. I did not notice the male bird near the nest, but heard him calling from a mangrove island about two hundred yards away. I saw another pair nearer the coast, but though I searched on several occasions, failed to discover their breeding-place.”

The above set of eggs of *H. sordidus*, which are exhibited here to-night, are pure white and nearly round in form, one specimen (A) being slightly compressed towards one end, the surface of the shell being very smooth and nearly lustreless, and partaking less of that glossy pearly-whiteness, characteristic of the known eggs of all the other members of the Australian *Alcedinidæ*. Length, (A) 1.23 × 1.03 inch; (B) 1.2 × 1.03 inch; (C) 1.22 × 1.05 inch.*

* After the above had been sent to press, Mr. Boyd, who was in Sydney, informed me that on the 26th of December he visited the nest of *H. sordidus* again in company with a black boy, who, on climbing the tree, reported that “two fellow egg sit down.” These eggs were quite fresh, and were evidently laid by the same bird that had been robbed in October, although the burrow in the Termite nest had been roughly broken into with a tomahawk. On this occasion one bird was flushed from the nest, the other was on a tree close at hand. The eggs are similar to those previously taken, and measure as follows:—(A) 1.24 × 1.03 inch; (B) 1.27 × 1.03 inch.

II. Notes on the Nesting-place and Eggs of *Cyanorhamphus rayneri*, G. R. Gray.

CYANORHAMPHUS RAYNERI, the Norfolk Island Red-fronted Parrakeet.

Platycercus rayneri, G. R. Gray, Ibis, 1862, p. 228.

This Parrakeet is somewhat similar to the Red-fronted Parrakeet, *C. novæ-zealandiæ*, of New Zealand, a species which is subject to considerable variation in colour and size, of which it appears to be an insular form differing only from *C. novæ-zealandiæ* in the extent of the red band on the forehead, its larger admeasurements, and having a more robust bill. Sir Walter Buller, who has examined the types of several of these insular forms of *C. novæ-zealandiæ* in the British Museum, and which have been described by various authors as distinct species, while admitting and pointing out their variation in colours and size in his second edition of the Birds of New Zealand,* follows in the footsteps of Dr. Finsch in his well-known work on the *Psittaci*†, and includes the following under the synonymy of *C. novæ-zealandiæ* ; *C. erythrotis*, Wagl., from Macquarie Island, *C. aucklandicus*, Bonap., from the Auckland Islands, *C. rayneri*, G. R. Gray, from Norfolk Island, and *C. cooki*, G. R. Gray, from New Zealand, Sir W. Buller separating and retaining only a smaller race of *C. novæ-zealandiæ* described by himself in the Transactions of the New Zealand Institute, Vol. vii. p. 220, 1874, under the name of *Platycercus rowleyi*.

Count Salvadori, however, in the recently issued "British Museum Catalogue," keeps all these forms separate and distinct,‡ with the exception of *C. rayneri*, of which he writes, "there is no doubt whatever as to *P. rayneri*, Gray, being the same as *C. cooki*," and has furthermore distinguished the specimens obtained

* Buller, Birds of New Zealand, 2nd Edit., p. 145 (1888).

† Finsch, Die Papag. Vol. ii. p. 273 (1868).

‡ Vol. xx. Catalogue of the Psittaci, by T. Salvadori, 1891.

by Macgillivray at Lord Howe Island during the voyage of H.M.S. "Herald" in 1853, under the name of *C. subflavescens*.

Dr. P. Herbert Metcalfe, the Resident Medical Officer on Norfolk Island, has kindly forwarded me for description two eggs of *C. rayneri*, taken from the hollow spout of a tree on the 12th of October, 1892. One egg (A) is oval in form and is equal in size at both ends; the other is a broad oval tapering somewhat to one end; they are pure white except where nest-stained, the surface of the shell being very smooth and lustreless. Length (A) 1.12 × 0.9 inch; (B) 1.08 × 0.87 inch. Last season another nest of the same species was obtained containing four eggs; they were, however, in a very advanced stage of incubation, the young birds being fully formed and nearly ready to emerge from the shell. I regret that Dr. Metcalfe did not secure the parent-birds with the eggs, but this species is well known to him, he having had five of them in confinement for several years.

In describing these eggs I provisionally retain the name of *C. rayneri*, so as to distinguish the locality they were taken from. If *C. rayneri* of Norfolk Island is the same as *C. cooki* of New Zealand, as stated by Count Salvadori, I should not be surprised to find, upon the examination of a large series of skins of the Red-fronted Parrakeet of Norfolk Island, that it is only an occasional and by no means constant variety of *C. novæ-zealandiæ*, not meriting even sub-specific distinction.